IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (currently amended) A method for assembling a flap system for a gas turbine engine exhaust nozzle including at least one backbone assembly, said method comprising:

providing a basesheet including a pair of circumferentially-spaced sides coupled together by an upstream side and a downstream side;

forming ~~at least one relief cut~~ a first plurality of relief cuts and a second plurality of relief cuts in the basesheet that ~~extends~~ extend at least partially across the basesheet from at least one of the circumferentially-spaced sides, wherein the first plurality of relief cuts have a length greater than that of the second plurality of relief cuts; and

coupling the basesheet to the backbone assembly.

2. (currently amended) A method in accordance with Claim 1 wherein the basesheet includes a flowside and an opposite back side, said forming ~~at least one relief cut~~ a first plurality of relief cuts and a second plurality of relief cuts in the basesheet further comprises extending ~~the~~ each relief cut through the basesheet from the basesheet flowside to the basesheet back side.

3. (currently amended) A method in accordance with Claim 1 wherein forming ~~at least one relief cut~~ a first plurality of relief cuts and a second plurality of relief cuts in the basesheet further comprises forming ~~at least one relief cut~~ a first plurality of relief cuts and a second plurality of relief cuts that ~~extends~~ extend at least partially across the basesheet from each of the circumferentially-spaced sides.

4. (currently amended) A method in accordance with Claim 1 wherein forming ~~at least one relief cut~~ a first plurality of relief cuts and a second plurality of relief cuts in the basesheet further comprises forming the ~~at least one relief cut~~ first plurality of relief cuts and the second plurality of relief cuts in the basesheet to facilitate reducing thermal stresses induced to said basesheet.

5. (currently amended) A method in accordance with Claim 1 wherein forming ~~at least one relief cut~~ a first plurality of relief cuts and a second plurality of relief cuts in the basesheet further comprises forming the ~~at least one relief cut~~ first plurality of relief cuts and the second plurality of relief cuts in the basesheet to facilitate reducing deformation of said basesheet.

6. (currently amended) An assembly for a gas turbine engine exhaust nozzle, said assembly comprising

a backbone; and

a basesheet configured to coupled to said backbone, said basesheet comprising ~~at least one relief cut~~ a first plurality of relief cuts and a second plurality of relief cuts and a pair of circumferentially-spaced sides coupled together by an upstream side and a downstream side, said ~~at least one relief cut~~ first plurality of relief cuts and second plurality of relief cuts extending from at least one of said circumferentially-spaced sides towards said other respective circumferentially-spaced side, said first plurality of relief cuts having a length greater than that of said second plurality of relief cuts.

7. (currently amended) An assembly in accordance with Claim 6 wherein said basesheet further comprises a flowpath side and an opposite back side, said ~~relief cut extends~~ first plurality of relief cuts and second plurality of relief cuts extending from said flowpath side to said back side.

8. (currently amended) An assembly in accordance with Claim 6 wherein said basesheet has a centerline axis, said ~~at least one relief cut~~ first plurality of relief cuts and second plurality of relief cuts oriented substantially perpendicularly to said centerline axis.

9. (currently amended) An assembly in accordance with Claim 6 wherein said ~~basesheet at least one relief cut~~ first plurality of relief cuts and second plurality of relief cuts ~~further comprises~~ comprise at least one relief cut extending at least partially across said basesheet from each said circumferentially-spaced basesheet side.

10. (currently amended) An assembly in accordance with Claim 6 wherein said ~~basesheet at least one relief cut~~ first plurality of relief cuts and second plurality of relief cuts ~~further comprises a plurality of relief cuts~~ are spaced axially between said basesheet upstream and downstream sides.

11. (currently amended) An assembly in accordance with Claim 6 wherein said ~~basesheet at least one relief cut~~ first plurality of relief cuts and second plurality of relief cuts ~~facilitates~~ facilitate reducing thermal stresses induced to said basesheet.

12. (currently amended) An assembly in accordance with Claim 6 wherein said basesheet ~~at least one relief cut~~ first plurality of relief cuts and second plurality of relief cuts ~~facilitates~~ facilitate reducing deformation of said basesheet.

13. (original) An assembly in accordance with Claim 6 wherein said basesheet upstream side has a first width measured between said circumferentially-spaced sides, said basesheet downstream side has a second width measured between said circumferentially-spaced sides, said first width different than said second width.

14. (currently amended) A gas turbine engine comprising a variable engine exhaust nozzle comprising a flap system coupled to said engine exhaust nozzle, said flap system comprising a backbone and a basesheet configured to coupled to said backbone, said basesheet comprising ~~at least one relief cut~~ a first plurality of relief cuts and second plurality of relief cuts and a pair of circumferentially-spaced sides coupled together by an upstream side and a downstream side, said ~~basesheet at least one relief cut~~ first plurality of relief cuts and second plurality of relief cuts extending from at least one of said circumferentially-spaced sides towards said other respective circumferentially-spaced side, said first plurality of relief cuts having a length greater than that of said second plurality of relief cuts.

15. (currently amended) A gas turbine engine in accordance with Claim 14 wherein said flap system basesheet comprises a flowpath side and an opposite back side, said ~~at least one basesheet relief cut~~ first plurality of relief cuts and second plurality of relief cuts extending from said flowpath side to said back side.

16. (currently amended) A gas turbine engine in accordance with Claim 15 wherein ~~said~~ said basesheet has a centerline axis, said ~~at least one relief cut~~ first plurality of relief cuts and second plurality of relief cuts are oriented substantially perpendicularly to said centerline axis.

17. (currently amended) A gas turbine engine in accordance with Claim 15 wherein said ~~basesheet at least one relief cut~~ first plurality of relief cuts and second plurality of relief cuts ~~further comprises~~ comprise at least one relief cut extending at least partially across said basesheet from each said circumferentially-spaced basesheet side.

18. (currently amended) A gas turbine engine in accordance with Claim 15 wherein said ~~basesheet at least one relief cut~~ first plurality of relief cuts and second plurality of relief cuts ~~further comprises~~ comprise a plurality of axially-spaced relief cuts extending between said basesheet upstream and downstream sides.

19. (currently amended) A gas turbine engine in accordance with Claim 6 wherein said ~~basesheet at least one relief cut~~ first plurality of relief cuts and second plurality of relief cuts facilitate ~~facilitates~~ reducing thermal stresses induced to said basesheet during engine operation.

20. (currently amended) A gas turbine engine in accordance with Claim 15 wherein said ~~basesheet at least one relief cut~~ first plurality of relief cuts and second plurality of relief cuts facilitate ~~facilitates~~ reducing deformation of said basesheet during engine operation.